

Freed Cuban Prisoners Tell Own Story Of Invasion Disaster at Bay of Pigs

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MIAKIA, Dec. 30. — On the doorstep of a rambling ranch-style home in Coral Gables, Fla., Ulises Carbo, 37, tenderly kissed his wife goodbye.

As the tall, trim Cuban walked down the steps, his 10-year-old son, Ulises, Jr., ran and caught him by the hand.

"Dad, the house keys," the boy said, his face set in adult seriousness. "I'll be the man of the house now. I must have the keys."

In Miami, Rene Leyva, 49, read final proof of the day's issue of the newspaper *Advance*, but his mind was not on the sheets. He was waiting for a telephone call.

Mr. Leyva's son, Eduardo, 17, had volunteered for an anti-Castro invasion force. Mr. Leyva had told the organizers that his son could go if he could go, too.

Telephone Rings

Now the telephone rang and a man told him they both could go. Mr. Leyva telephoned the publisher and said he would be away for a few days . . .

At the airline counter at Miami Airport, Raoul Arango was spending his last day behind the desk. He smiled to himself.

He was tired of standing, and here he was, going off to learn to be a paratrooper. That could be pretty hard on the feet, too, he thought . . .

It was March 15, 1961.

A call to arms had rung through the exile Cuban community, and men were gathering.

"There was really no other mission left for us in life but to defend, said there were some Cuban recruiters who gave at least the impression they were representing the United States, and particularly the Central Intelligence Agency.

Recruiting Incentive

They said an incentive to recruiting was the line that with the United States behind it, the invasion could not fail.

"I never talked to any Americans," said Mr. Arango. "There were many Cuban groups in Florida talking about invasion, and I joined this one because it was the largest and seemed to have the best chance of success."

So in the spring of 1961, when thousands had fled Fidel Castro's regime to Florida, men were converging on the Opa-locka Airport, an abandoned Navy and Marine base near Miami, in trucks and private cars.

The trucks drove up alongside a row of unmarked American planes, and the men climbed inside. By now it was dark.

"We flew straight to Trax, an airfield high in the mountains of Guatemala," Mr. Leyva said.

The 49-year-old Leyva was assigned to air force maintenance and stayed behind. Others went into combat battalions. Speaking of his young son, Mr. Leyva said:

"Poor little Eduardito. He looked so frail and helpless in training. He had always been strictly a student, never an athlete. He never even played soldier in games."

Looked Self-Assured

"He didn't know how to aim a gun, or even fire one. But a few weeks later, when he came down from the mountain, he looked strong and self-assured like a real soldier. I was proud of him."

Professional soldiers, many of them Americans, whipped the men into shape.

"I practiced parachute jumps with Americans," said Mr. Arango. "I made five practice jumps. I didn't ask them what they were doing there."

"I cannot say if the Americans were on active duty, or officially representing their Government," said Mr. Carbo.

"At first it was Cubans instructing us," said Mr. Santiago. "We trained for about a month. Then we started getting ready to go to Cuba. Vendors, women and children, were on the docks, and President Somoza came down to visit before we sailed."

Had B-26 Bombers

"I stayed behind at an airfield in Nicaragua to help tend the bombers and equipment," the elder Leyva said. "We had B-26 bombers."

"Nothing much happened on the way to Cuba," young Leyva recalled. "We were escorted most of the way by United States destroyers. We expected them to go into action, but they didn't."

(United States military authorities declined both the one-day interview and the one-hour interview requested by the reporter.)

and now, to say whether any American warships or planes aided in the invasion effort.)

"I saw one plane," said Mr. Santiago. "It was ours. It went over on the 15th, on the way to bomb an air base in Cuba."

"We were getting briefings on the way over. We were ready and we thought we were going to win."

"At midnight they got us up. We had got together to throw away letters, pictures, watches, rings, everything we loved before going in to fight for what we loved."

The men got into the boats to go ashore.

"They were little runabouts with outboard motors. They were shooting at us, machine guns. It was thick," Mr. Santiago said.

Charged in Ranks

"From the moment of landing I lost all physical sensation," said young Leyva. "It seemed like I was watching a bad movie. Their men came screaming 'Patria o Muerte' (Fatherland or Death) and then they fell dead. They kept coming in waves."

"They were in closed ranks, in the most amazing manner," Mr. Carbo said. "They finally broke under fire, but scores were killed."

Back at the armada, things were going wrong.

"After the first boatload of troops got off, the unloading equipment jammed," said Humberto Sanchez, 28, an infantryman who was waiting to get ashore.

"The Houston (a freighter) was full of soldiers and tons of aviation gas, munitions and other supplies."

"We thought the first B-26 heading for us that day was heading for us that day was shooting when he needed to shoot, doing what he needed to do. By 7 o'clock the shooting was over for a while," Mr. Santiago said.

"We saw a truckload of women militia approaching, firing their guns in awkward fashion. We thought, 'This is war?' We blasted them with a bazooka shell," Mr. Sanchez said.

"Castro must have suffered 4,000 casualties in those first few hours," said Mr. Carbo. "We captured an important highway leading into the beach and a small airport."

"We dropped right on top of the Castro forces," Mr. Arango said. "At first we figured some-
where and when we were going to land, but we may have just landed in the wrong place."

Two Shot in Air

"Two of my buddies were shot to death while we were coming down. We never did get connected up with the main force."

(Mr. Berrellez, one of the authors of this story, was in Havana that morning. He saw thousands of Mr. Castro's militia pouring east toward the Bay of Pigs. These troops had been rushed a week earlier in the other direction to answer a false invasion rumor. The big anti-Castro underground, which had prepared to blow up bridges and tunnels between Havana and the invasion area, had been wiped out by mass arrests April 15 when invasion planes attacked without previous warning to the underground.)

By nightfall, Mr. Castro's reinforcements had reached the battle area, and the tide began to turn.

"There were some ferocious battles that night," said young Leyva. "Their tanks came up and fought with ours. Our crews were better trained and we hurt them."

"Eight of Castro's tanks attacked us," Mr. Santiago said. "We got all but one."

Supplies Run Low

Then supplies ran low. "We had no food, no water. I had a couple of crackers with me, that's all," Mr. Santiago said.

"By the 19th, we were about out of ammunition and our bazookas were down to one shell per gun. Their attacks were getting heavier and now their artillery was coming into action. Their air force strafed us," Mr. Leyva said.

"We got the order to retreat. We were told we were on our own."

From then on it was long, weary months in prison . . . months of poor food, uncertainty as to the future, and sometimes inhuman treatment. At last, after what seemed an eternity to the prisoners, Mr. Castro agreed to let them go.

When the prisoners were freed, they were given money orders back to the New York, the banks and sent people with the dollars and sent the money orders back to the American members, both the one-day interview and the one-hour interview requested by the reporter.)

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